

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH CAPTAIN JOHN NOWELL, COMMODORE OF AFRICA PARTNERSHIP STATION 2008 VIA TELECONFERENCE TIME: 9:00 A.M. EDT DATE: TUESDAY, MAY 20, 2008

Copyright (c) 2008 by Federal News Service, Inc., Ste. 500 1000 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Federal News Service is a private firm not affiliated with the federal government. No portion of this transcript may be copied, sold or retransmitted without the written authority of Federal News Service, Inc. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of the original work prepared by a United States government officer or employee as a part of that person's official duties. For information on subscribing to the FNS Internet Service, please visit <http://www.fednews.com> or call (202)347-1400

(Note: Please refer to www.dod.mil for more information.)

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): Captain Nowell, thank you very much for joining us here on the Bloggers Roundtable. And you've almost kind of given your opening statement already. But if you wouldn't mind, you're with the Africa Partnership Station 2008, and the floor is yours, sir. So, welcome to the Bloggers Roundtable.

CAPT. NOWELL: Okay. Well, thanks very much. And certainly it's something new for me and it's a treat. And as I go through with -- if anyone needs -- if I get the format wrong, just let me know.

But let me start by kind of introducing myself and so that you understand kind of where I fit. And the first question was, what is Africa Partnership Station? I would preface it by saying, as you know, I'm Commodore John Nowell. I'm the commodore of a destroyer squadron. It's based out of Naples, Italy. And in that hat, I control the surface forces, the ships that come into the Naval Forces Europe and Africa theater. But about two years ago, the commander of Naval Forces Europe started a regional task force commander organization, where you would have one major commander, which is my level, in charge of all of the naval forces working in a particular region. So I'm also the commander of Task Force West and Central Africa, and in that hat I was the commander -- or still am the commander for Africa Partnership Station, which, again, is focused in the Gulf of Guinea and West and Central Africa. So whether it's a ship or a plane or a sub or a Seabee, they would fall under my tactical control.

And the idea was, because partnerships and relationships matter so much, to have someone that our partner nations' leadership -- where they know John Nowell, they know how to get in touch with me, they can tell me what they like, what they don't like, as well as our country teams, whether it's the ambassador or the defense attache or the naval attache.

So that's who I am and that's why I was the person that then commanded our inaugural deployment of what we call Africa Partnership Station.

And I'll backtrack just a little bit for the rest of the audience that just joined to just say that APS, as we call it, is a multinational, multi-agency effort that's aimed at working with our West and Central Africa partners to increase their capability and capacity in maritime safety and security.

And it's founded upon the belief that as we look at the maritime threats in that region -- whether it's the loss of \$1 billion a year in fishing, the fact that 25 percent of the cocaine flow to Europe now transits West Africa, you know, 60 percent of human trafficking is in Sub-Saharan -- is from Sub-Saharan Africa or things like illegal oil bunkering in the Niger Delta that's reportedly costing up to \$3 million a day -- when you look at things like the narco-trafficking, the illegal fishing and the energy security, those are threats that are faced by all of the countries in that region but certainly by the international community.

And so recognizing that, our chief of Naval Operations started an initiative called the Global Maritime Partnerships. And the idea is that no one country can go at these maritime threats by themselves, and so you need a partnership. And so within that is a concept called Global Fleet Stations, where you have a persistent presence in a region to go ahead and help our partners build that capability and capacity. And so Africa Partnership Station is an initiative within that Global Fleet Station concept and part of that Global Maritime Partnership.

So I apologize; I know that that's a little long-winded and it may sound a bit confusing, but I think it's important to note that this is just one example of the type of approach that the Navy and our partners are using in other parts of the world, you know, even as we speak.

So for APS, I had an 11-nation staff that was composed of both African and European officers and enlisted members. My first chief of staff was British, second was French. My plans officer was German. His assistant was Guinean. My shiprider coordinator was Cameroonian. I had Gabonese and Equatorial Guinean and Nigerian staff officers as well as other European countries. And so this multinational approach and multi-agency -- and I would mention that I had a political adviser from our State Department. I had military-civil affairs coordinators that helped to coordinate our work with NGOs and other agencies like USAID. But collectively this team allowed us to engage with 15 West and Central Africa nations using multiple platforms. You have probably heard of Fort McHenry, which was the amphibious ship that I was embarked upon, but also the high-speed vessel Swift, the submarine Annapolis, the cruiser San Jacinto and P-3 detachments, as well as Seabees in countries and docks, et cetera. But we were able to train over 1,500 students in 1,700-plus courses of instruction and in more than 15 discrete courses of instruction, like martial arts or small boat operations or maritime law.

And we were also able, in addition to that focus on the training for maritime safety and security, to do humanitarian assistance and community outreach, which was pretty significant: the distribution of more than 1 million high-nutrition meals that Project Handclasp provided; the delivery of more than \$3.4 million worth of the NGO Project HOPE medical equipment; more than \$100,000 worth of specific hospital equipment in Sao Tome; and a dual-use -- and the building use of a dual-use clinic that I can talk about further; and then also medical and dental outreach, where we were able to get to more than 1,200 patients. But perhaps more importantly, just as we take a train-the-trainer approach when we're working with navies or coast guards or fisheries or customs folks, here, our health professionals trained 185 midwives and 164 nurses, so that can become self-sustaining, in addition to the medical outreach, you know, they were able to do there.

So at any rate, I apologize for that long lead-in, but hopefully that's helpful in kind of couching for you a little bit what APS was, why we were doing it and some of what we did.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you very much, sir. And it did.

And Andrew, since you were first on line, why don't you get us started here?

Q Great. Commodore, Andrew Lubin from the Military Observer. Great brief. Thank you very much. Do you have people on the ground in these different countries, and how do you relate with -- how do you work with AFRICOM, who seems to be winding down or taking a back seat what they were hoping to do a year ago?

CAPT. NOWELL: Well, first of all, as I'm always quick to point out -- and in fact, I was at a State Department roundtable yesterday where we actually had the sitting ambassador for Gabon and Sao Tome and retired Ambassador Chavez, who is -- leads the Africa Center for Strategic Studies. And as I told them, whenever I go into any country, the first thing that I tell the ambassador is that I work for him or her. And so as we coordinate our activities with a particular country, we are careful to work that through the ambassador's country team.

So that means the Defense attache or -- we don't have many NATTs (sp) in that region, but -- so when you asked, do we have folks in country, and how do we coordinate, we do that through the country teams.

Now, I would note that since many of those country teams do not have maritime professionals, we've actually tapped the Navy's Reserve community to try and get naval officers into some of these embassies, so that they can help with that capability and capacity building. And that's called the Maritime Partnership Program. And sometimes they go there for an extended stay, you know, up to four to five months. In other cases, they will go several weeks before we're going to pull a ship or a P-3 detachment or something like that in to go ahead and help with, you know, some of the coordination and just the labor that's involved in that kind of an activity.

So that is sort of the boots -- that is sort of the folks that we've got there.

Now, you asked, do we have people working down there now? I would just mention that right now, as we speak, I've got 25 U.S. Navy Seabees that are in Liberia that are working on four separate projects. Two are clinics, a road and a school. And so they're doing that.

I have a U.S. Coast Guard cutter that will be here in the next week and a half, two weeks. We'll arrive in Cape Verde and we'll do some law enforcement ops with them. We're going to take some teams that we've trained up over the last two to three years to do vessel boardings and search. And we're finishing up the government-to-government agreements that will allow us to then have them embark on the Coast Guard cutter to do patrols, as asked for by the Cape Verdean government, within their exclusive economic zone, to -- you know, to try and give them a better awareness of what's going on there and then some response capability.

But to get to the last part of your question, regarding the interface with AFRICOM, I think that as you look at Africa Partnership Station, multinational, multi-agency partnerships and relationships, that's all about what AFRICOM is all about. So that's not the most elegant way to put it, but we think that APS really is a case study in the kind of construct that AFRICOM is going to have.

We did have a chance to host General Ward when we were in Limbe, Cameroon. In fact, he brought much of the senior Cameroonian leadership from the capital down to Fort McHenry at anchor off of Limbe. And he certainly look at APS as being a very important tool for his evolving command there at AFRICOM. And while I would not speak for General Ward, I think that what he would probably tell you is that it's important right now to let deeds and actions speak for themselves. And therefore APS is a powerful example of the kind of positive engagement with partners that we can do, and it's the kind of approach that AFRICOM will be taking.

Q Great. Thanks very much.

CAPT. NOWELL: Sure.

MR. HOLT: David.

Q Hi. It's David Axe from War is Boring.

CAPT. NOWELL: Hi, David.

Q Hi. How are you?

CAPT. NOWELL: Good, thanks. How about you?

Q Great. So, any plans to take this thing east, into dicier waters than West Africa?

CAPT. NOWELL: Sure, that's a great question. And first of all, I would just mention that we are certainly engaging off the east coast and south coast of Africa as well, in fact. We just had one of our amphibious ships spend about a month with my contemporary, a guy named Commodore Nick Holman, who is the commander of the Southeast Africa -- South and East Africa Task Force, engaging in countries like Tanzania, Madagascar, Mozambique.

So it's not -- we're not quite to the stage of kind of the Africa Partnership Station approach there yet. Some of that is just the maturity of the engagement, and some, frankly, is also the issue of resources. And what Admiral Fitzgerald, our commander, is certainly keen on is making sure that what we do, we do right. And so what he does not want is a peanut butter spread where you try and solve world hunger. He wants to make sure that we focus. So we will continue APS -- right now it's West and Central Africa, and then as additional assets become -- and we will continue engagement on a more limited basis off East Africa and South, and then as more assets become available, I think you'll see that very same approach over on the other side.

Q Great. Thanks.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And who else joined us? Ghalrain (ph), are you here with us?

Q Yes. MR. HOLT: Okay, go ahead.

Q Thank you, Captain, for joining us.

CAPT. NOWELL: Sure.

Q This is a great conversation. I want to talk about the evolution of Liberia, which has got a lot of attention. It seems that -- five ships, sounds like \$3.4 million worth of equipment, \$100,000 worth of humanitarian. Can you describe in detail a little bit of the why you did it, how you did it, and what you accomplished there?

CAPT. NOWELL: Sure. And that is a really good question.

There's some elements of Liberia that probably have not gotten as much exposure as they could. But first of all, certainly we believe that Liberia has a special relationship with the United States. And I probably don't need to expand any more than saying that with you, because I'm certain that you get it. And they are eager to continue that partnership.

And so as we look -- one of the things that we talk about with APS is that we're not just engaging with folks wearing navy uniforms or coast guard uniforms, because maritime safety and security is very, very broad. Now, right now Liberia does not have a coast guard, but they are in the process of kind of conceptualizing and looking at how they are going to here, near-term, start their coast guard back up. But what they do have is a very -- you know, some very positive progress from the Armed Forces of Liberia side with respect to their soldiers.

So the ambassador had asked us to engage with Africa Partnership Station as a show of partnership, had asked us what areas we might be able to do training for those soldiers that the U.S. government has been working very hard. And as you look at some of the training that we're able to provide, such as non-commissioned officer leadership training, officer leadership training, logistics or the martial arts -- there were many areas where we able to provide training and in fact did for about a hundred AFL students, as well as the ability to take this multi-agency and multinational team and talk to some of the ministries that were there in Monrovia, like the ministry of fisheries or customs, about what they needed to key on as they look at the refurbishment of the port, as they look at putting protocols in place, you know, for environmental protection, for protection of the fisheries and as they look at forming a coast guard.

Now, the other piece that we executed, while off of Monrovia, was a seabasing demonstration. And the Navy has a new system. It's called the Navy's Improved Navy Lighterage System.

And in simple terms, this is a floating dock, that you can build offshore and you can then use to take stuff off, maritime prepositioning ships, and then get them on to, you know, connectors, high-speed connectors notionally to then get them to the beach. And so we wanted to do a demonstration there, where we also use that capability to get some of this humanitarian assistance type of equipment inland.

And so just to expand on that a little bit for you, we pulled two maritime prepositioning ships, plus Fort McHenry and Swift. We all converged -- it was right around Easter -- off of Monrovia. The prepo ships offloaded this floating -- these floating dry-docks. We put them together.

And then the day before Easter Sunday, we moored one of the maritime prepositioning ships. And we had the Bobo and the Wheat there. They were the MPS ships. But we offloaded seven Marine vehicles, humvees and trucks onto -- they call it -- an RRDF, which is really just a -- now that I'm saying it, I can't think of what the acronym stands for.

But the bottom line is, it's a roll-on, roll-off discharge facility, so RRDF. And we then take them, using a powered section of that, into the well deck of the Fort McHenry. We put those vehicles together, married them up with their Marines, who had flown into Senegal and then come down on the prepo ships. And we sent the Swift up to get them.

So we then finished putting the vehicles together, married them up with their Marines and then took them back out, got them on the RRDF. Swift pulled up to the RRDF. The vehicles went onboard Swift and went into the Port of Monrovia.

And then the next morning, we did a convoy to four different sites, hospitals and schools there in Monrovia, to drop off this equipment.

So we think that it's a great example of a capability that you could use in an austere environment. Again, if you had a -- some kind of a natural disaster, you know, or any other event that made the ability to bring things like the prepo ships into port, the ability to do that seven miles out worked and it worked well. And so we layered that as part of the whole APS engagement there.

And so as we look at that in general -- again the, you know, more than 100 AFL soldiers trained, \$3.4 million worth of, you know, HA equipment. You know, we had the president -- President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf actually came out and spent a half-day on Fort McHenry and had the chance to participate in the graduation ceremony for her soldiers. And in fact, she said it was the first time that she'd ever seen her country from the sea.

So we're pretty proud of what we did in Liberia. Again, it shows you that the inland reach that you can get from something like an APS effort is pretty substantial. I mean, I just kind of gave you that example. In some other places we might have Fort McHenry or Swift at anchor or in-port. And for instance, in Cameroon we did maritime law training in the capital of Yaounde, which is more than five hours inland from where the ship was anchored in Limbe. So a lot of flexibility there.

But at any rate, those were some of the details from the Liberia piece. Does that help a little bit?

Q Very much. Those ships couldn't make port in Monrovia; is that true?

CAPT. NOWELL: The Swift could. The Fort McHenry could not, nor could the MPS ships.

Q How many other of the cities along the coastline there -- pretty good-sized cities -- can only the Swift access, as opposed to the larger ships?

CAPT. NOWELL: Sure. Well, I guess, let me -- I can kind of walk you -- you know, walk you down through. We're able to get Fort McHenry -- and again,

Fort McHenry is an amphibious ship, does have a fairly, you know, shallow draft, about 8-1/2 meters. Now, that's certainly more than Swift, but that still allows Fort McHenry to get into places like Dakar, Senegal, or Cape Verde, to pull into -- in Ghana, both Tema and Takoradi or Sekondi Naval Base to -- you do have to anchor off of Limbe, Cameroon, but we could probably get Fort McHenry into Douala.

It would be a little bit tight here in Cameroon, but we were able to get Swift in there. Fort McHenry was able to pull into both Port- Gentil and Libreville, Gabon, pier-side. In Equatorial Guinea, she was able to pull pier-side. And in Sao Tome and Principe, she did have to anchor out.

So in reality, again, it is harder for me, though, to get, you know, for instance, a guided missile destroyer into some of those same places. But as we look at sort of what we think the ideal platform for this kind of mission is -- which is an amphibious ship -- you can get into most of the places that we're doing engagement or you can anchor in very close. And then you have the connectors with the landing craft, the LCUs or the LCMs, which are just smaller versions of the landing craft and rigid-hull inflatables and other boats.

Q Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Any other follow-up questions?

Q Oh, yeah. (Inaudible) -- Commander, Andrew Lubin again. You have --

CAPT. NOWELL: Yeah.

Q Yeah. Are you basically working with the seacoast countries or do you have anybody or any projects going inland?

CAPT. NOWELL: Well, first of all, we are primarily working with the countries along the coast. And we look at there being, you know, 19 West and Central Africa countries there that are kind of along the coastline. But for the reasons that I mentioned earlier with the inland reach, that doesn't mean that in the future you couldn't, perhaps, with the right kinds of training teams, do some inland just because it's -- you know, for instance, as we look at the next Fort McHenry-like ship that's going to be heading down, the Nashville -- we were here last week. We spent three days doing the initial planning conference for that deployment.

The Army expressed -- and we will probably have Marines on board that ship to do some training. You know, the Army said, "Hey, could you bring an Army detachment?" And the answer is yes. It gives you a lot of flexibility. So while we're not necessarily doing that with the inland countries right now, that doesn't mean that you couldn't. But the other thing that I would mention is that as you look at some of the threats that we're trying to combat -- and in fact, Ambassador Chaveas from ACSS made the point at the State Department round-table yesterday that there's a direct benefit to the inland countries because, for instance, with the drugs, while they come ashore there in the coastal nations, they're then moving overland or they're going to some of those inland countries.

When you look at things like the hydrographic surveys that we're doing in partnership with, for instance, the Portuguese and the French, that drives, you know, updated charts drives insurance rates down. So it has an

immediate return on investment for countries. And so it's cheaper to get goods places, which will also have an impact, you know, for the inland countries.

So a bit of a long-winded response but does that help?

Q Yeah, very much.

Yeah, when you talked Central Africa, I was thinking more of the Central African countries north of Ghana, north of Nigeria, compared to the ones down in the --

CAPT. NOWELL: Right, right.

Q Do you get your Marines from a MEU? Where are they coming in from?

CAPT. NOWELL: Yeah, the Marines, as you know, Marine Forces Europe, which -- I will tell you -- they were huge both in the planning and execution of the operations off of Monrovia. Very small, hard-hitting staff. So just like the forces that come to work for me in Naval Forces Europe and Africa, they are, you know, they're RFFed, you know, Marines that then come in from, you know, all over to then go ahead and execute the mission.

Q Great. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Anyone else. All right.

Q You talked about the Annapolis and the cruiser that visited.

CAPT. NOWELL: Sure.

Q Were there any European ships that came and participated?

CAPT. NOWELL: Yeah. In fact, the French ship Tonnerre was working off of West and Central Africa the same time that we were. We actually put an APS liaison officer onboard Tonnerre for a month and a half. I mentioned the fact that we had French training teams onboard Fort McHenry, as well as other nations. But for instance, you know, the French would use, you know, our classrooms in the former Francophone countries to do classes with our help in supporting that.

But in similar fashion, we look at using or we look at partnering with other countries, whether it's the French ship Tonnerre, you know, who was down there at the same time, and we had the liaison officer; whether it's, you know, the HMS Endurance that will be down, that might perhaps take some training teams.

Certainly we are pushing that.

So in direct response, though, Tonnerre was down at the same time. We actually did a mutual engagement visit in Sao Tome. We were focused more on the TSC, training side, they were doing a national operation called Carimbe (sp), but again, there was a lot of interchange going on there. And what we want to do with our partners like the French or the Portuguese or the British is we want to complement what they're doing, not be duplicative. And we want to, you know, leverage each other's, you know, experience and strengths there. And we feel pretty good about that.

And as you may recall, you know, the French ship Tonnerre here this spring had two drug busts. One was about 3.2 tons of cocaine that was off the coast of West and Central Africa, and that was utilizing, you know, information that was supplied by the U.S., U.K. and a new outfit called Mayockin (ph). So, certainly you see that partnership.

Q Thank you.

CAPT. NOWELL: Mm-hmm.

MR. HOLT: Okay. All right. And just about out of time here, sir. We do appreciate you joining us. Thanks very much.

U.S. Captain John Nowell, who is the commodore of the Africa Partnership Station 2008. Thanks for being with us, sir, and I'm hoping we can have you back and we can speak again here maybe in a few weeks and see how things are going.

CAPT. NOWELL: That would be great. I'm available any time. And I appreciate all of your time.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you very much, sir.

Q Thanks, Captain.

CAPT. NOWELL: Okay. Have a good day. Bye-bye.

END.